

EXHIBIT A



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Kirsner et al.

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(45) **Date of Patent:** May 3, 2005

(54) **METHOD OF FORMULATING AND USING A DRILLING MUD WITH FRAGILE GELS**

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(Continued)

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(73) **Assignee:** Halliburton Energy Services Inc., Duncan, OK (US)

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(*) **Notice:** Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 284 days.

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(Continued)

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Primary Examiner—Philip C. Tucker

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** C09K 7/06

(74) **Attorney, Agent, or Firm**—Craig W. Roddy; Karen B. Tripp

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 507/103; 507/107; 507/108;

ABSTRACT

507/136; 507/137; 507/138; 507/139; 507/140

A method for drilling, running casing in, and/or cementing a borehole in a subterranean formation without significant loss of drilling fluid is disclosed, as well as compositions for use in such method. The method employs a drilling fluid comprising a fragile gel or having fragile gel behavior and providing superior oil mud rheology and overall performance. The fluid is especially advantageous for use in deep water wells because the fluid exhibits minimal difference between downhole equivalent circulating density and surface density notwithstanding differences in drilling or penetration rates. When an ester and isomerized olefin blend is used for the base of the fluid, the fluid makes an environmentally acceptable and regulatory compliant invert emulsion drilling fluid. The fluid preferably contains no organophilic clays.

(58) **Field of Search** 507/103, 107,

507/108, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140

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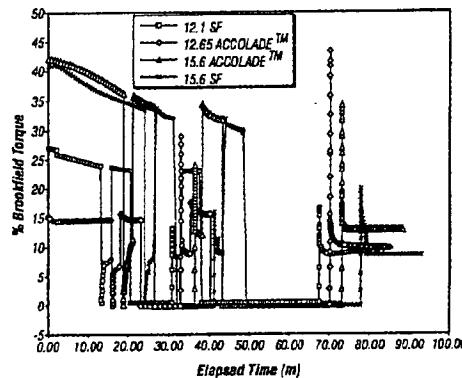
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150 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



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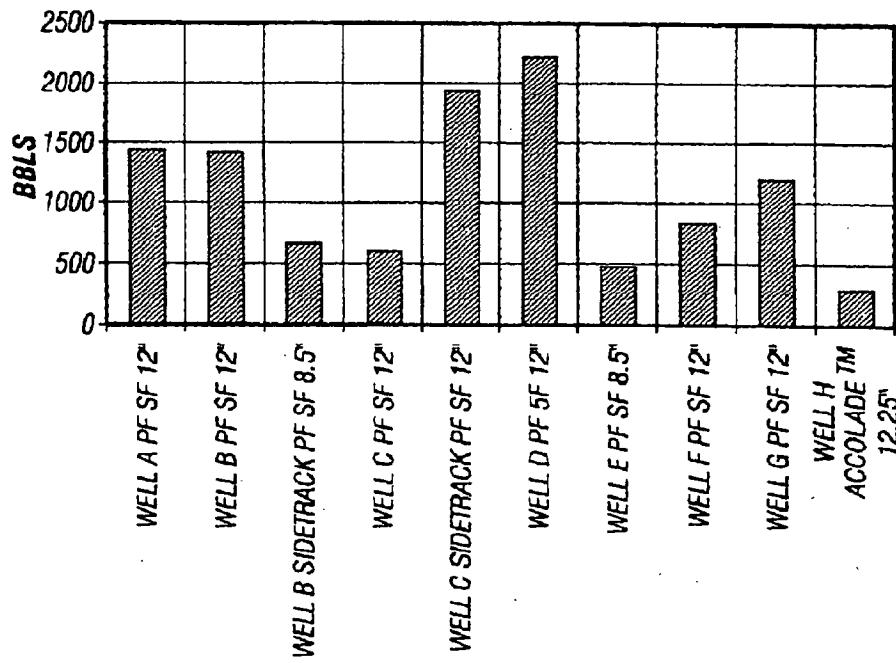


FIG. 1A

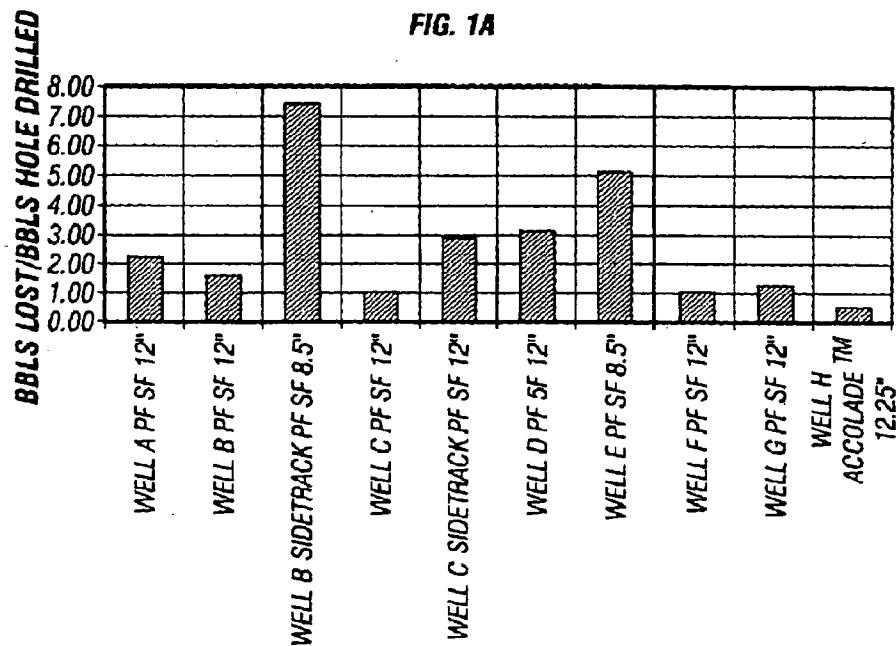


FIG. 1B

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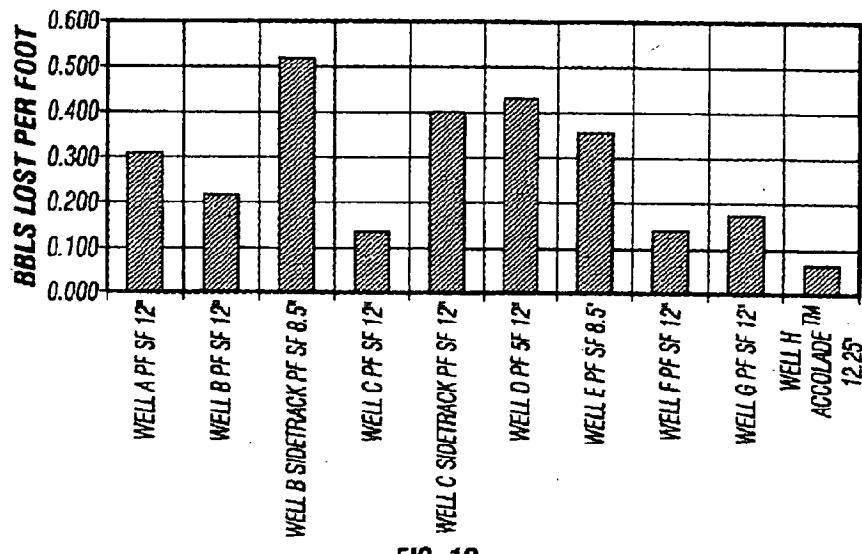


FIG. 1C

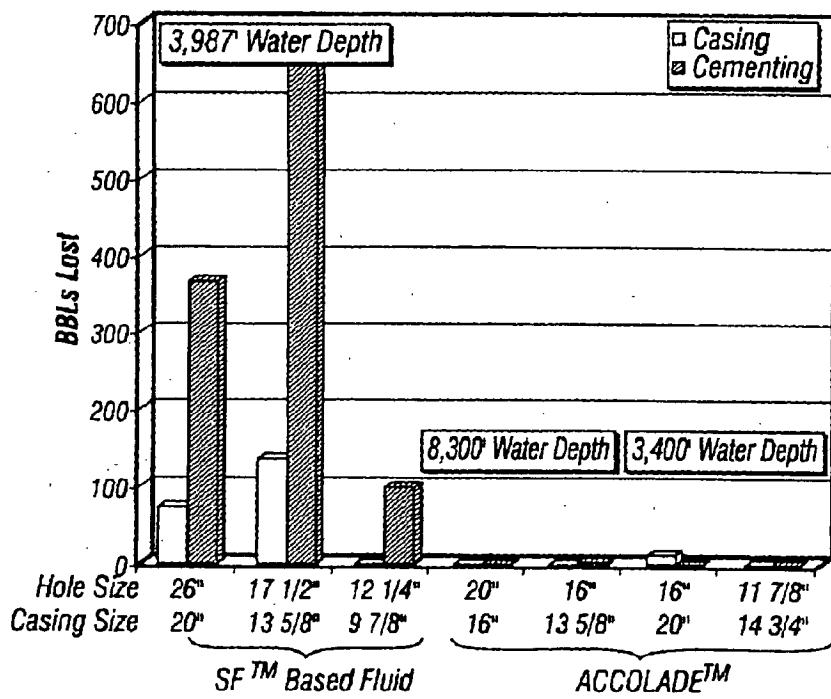


FIG. 2

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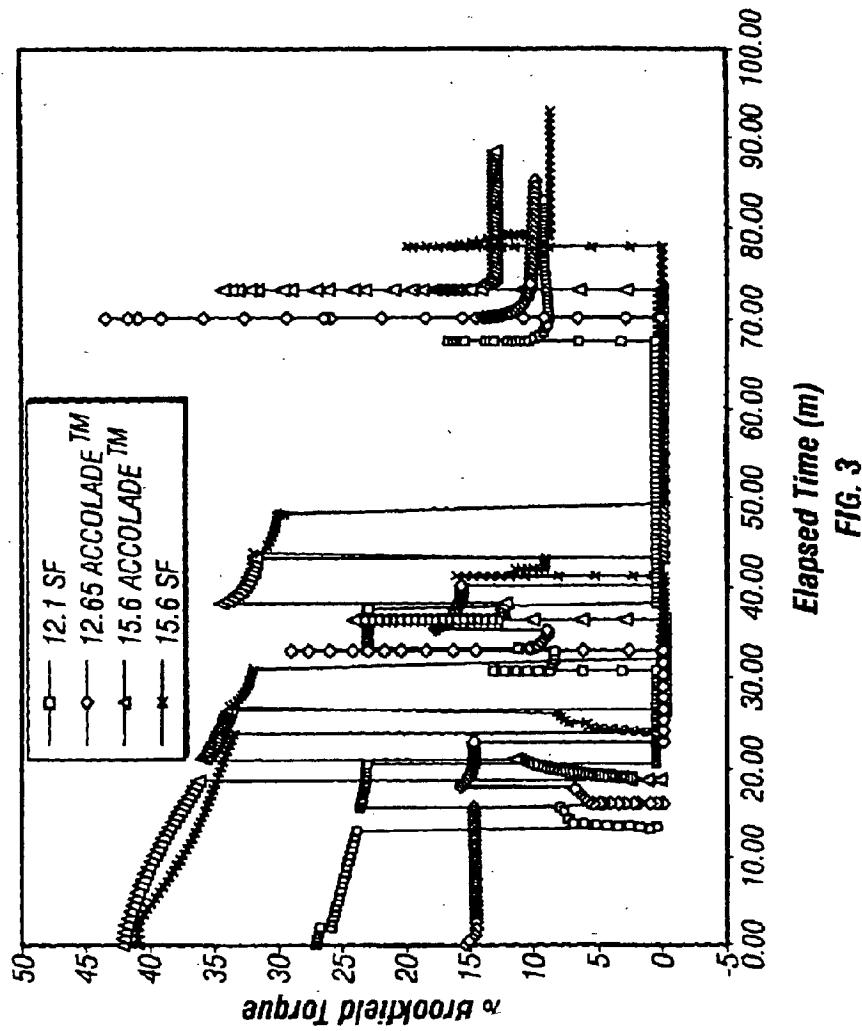


FIG. 3

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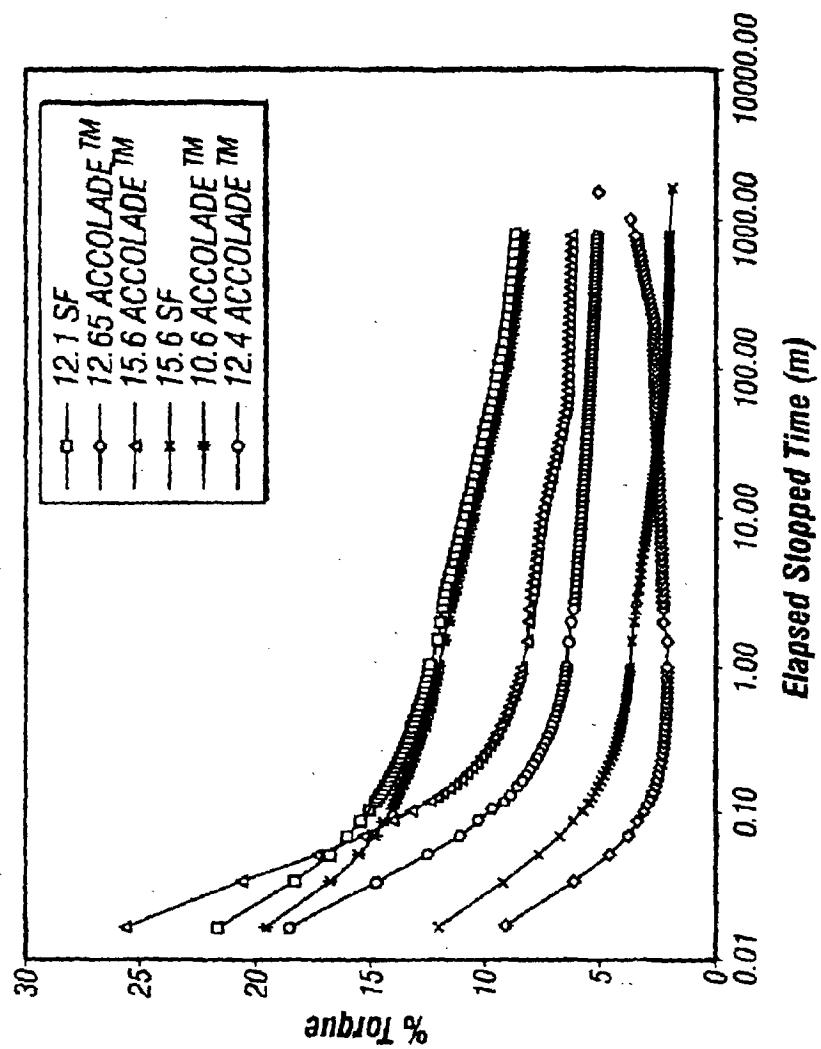


FIG. 4

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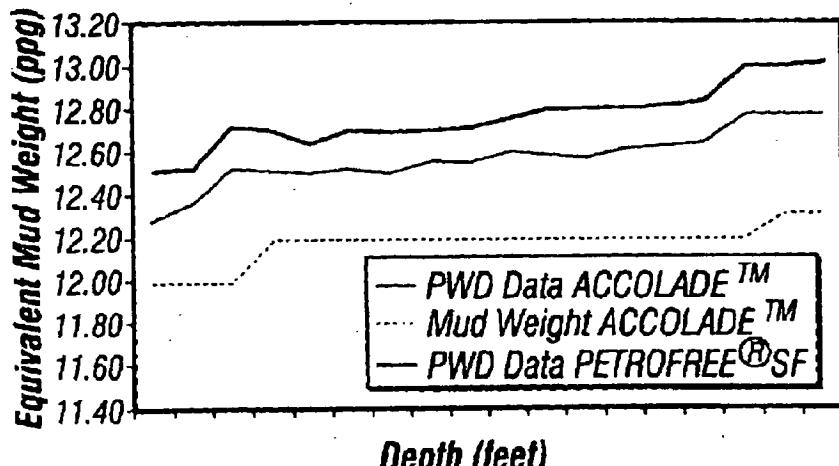


FIG. 5A

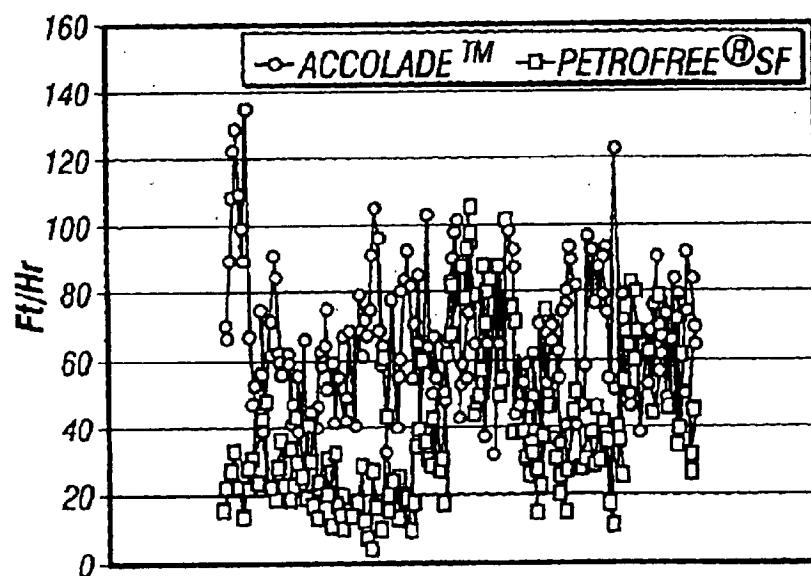


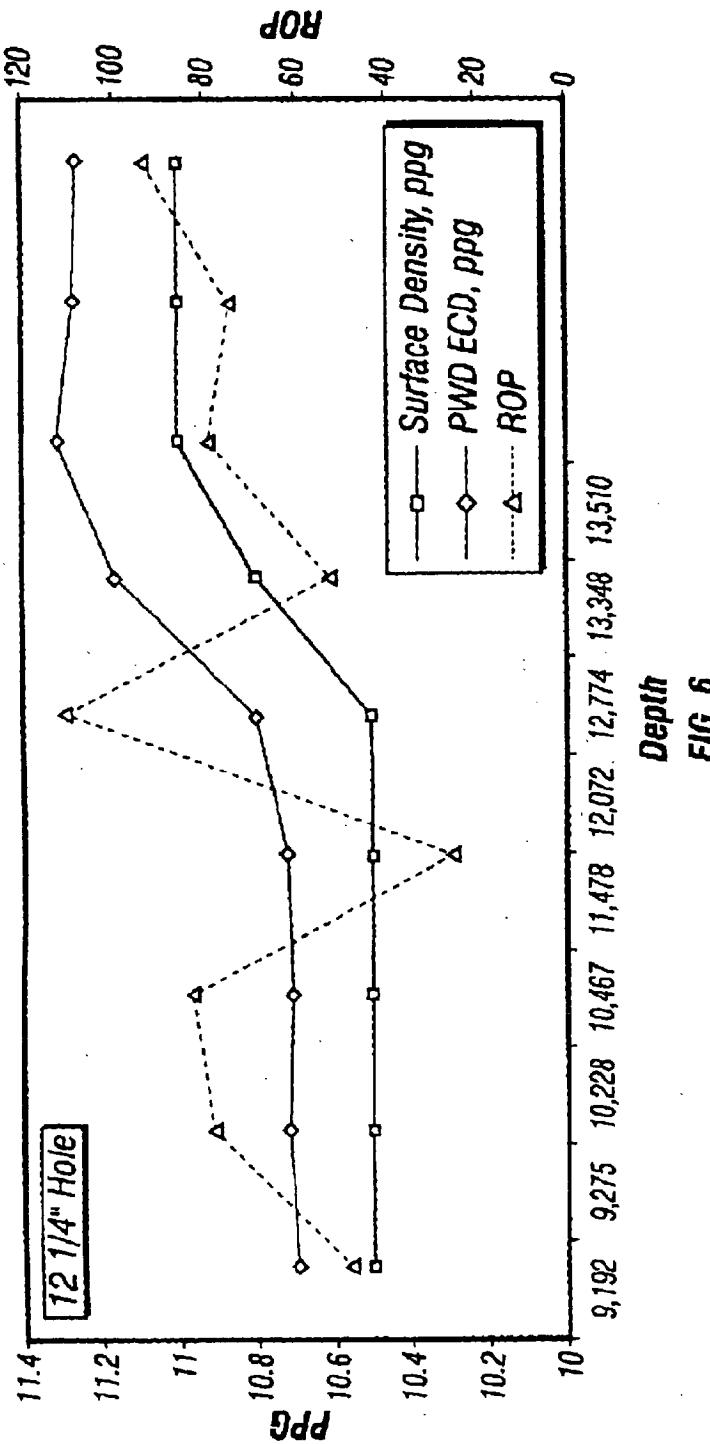
FIG. 5B

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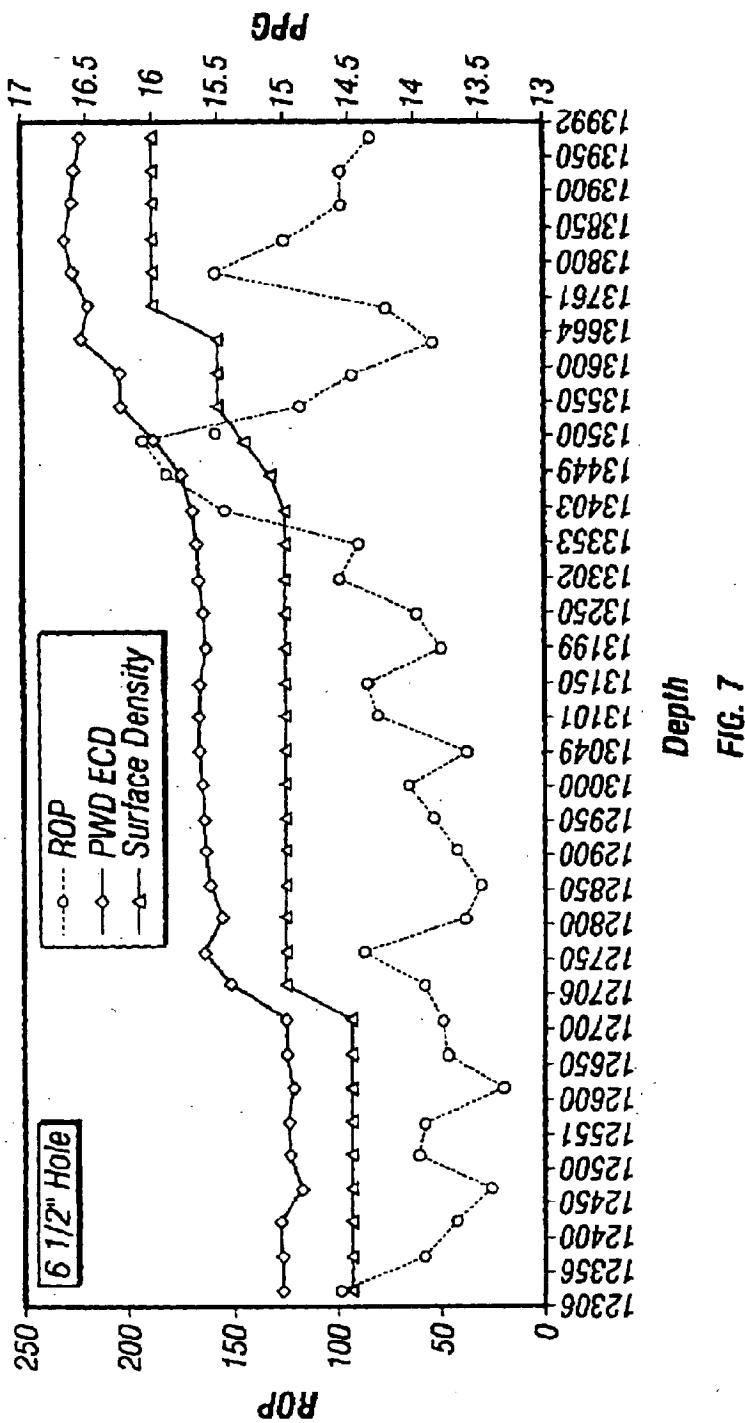


FIG. 7

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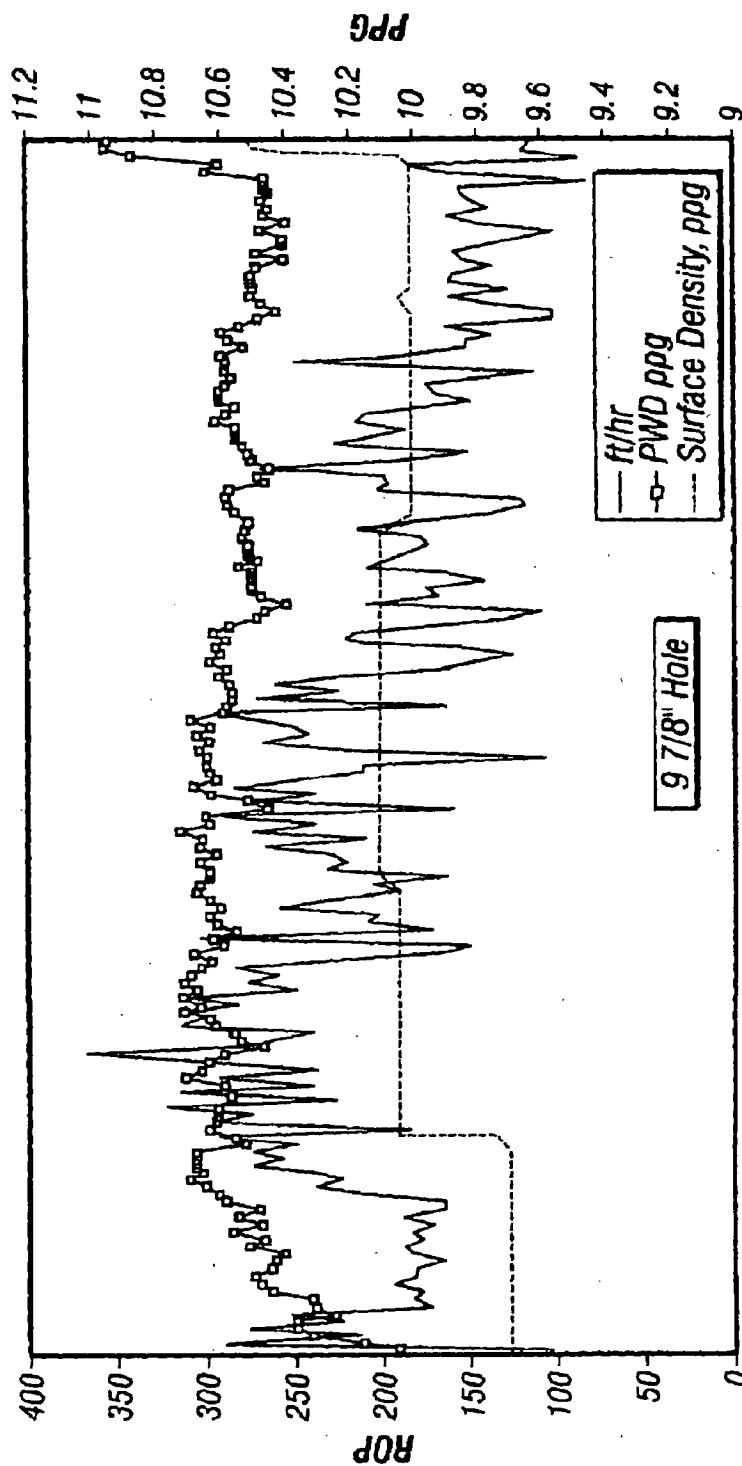


FIG. 8

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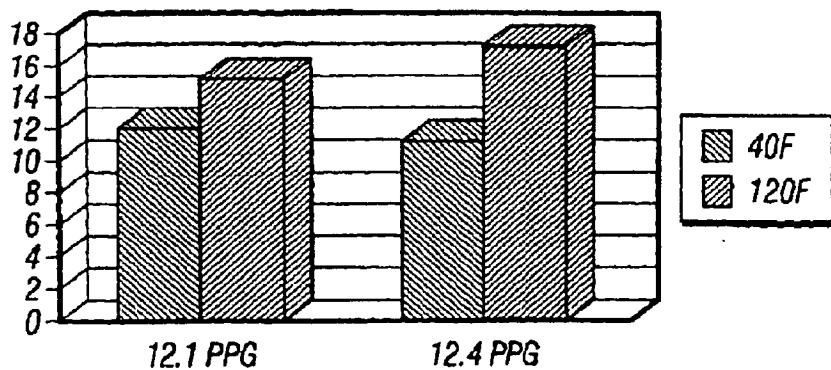


FIG. 9A

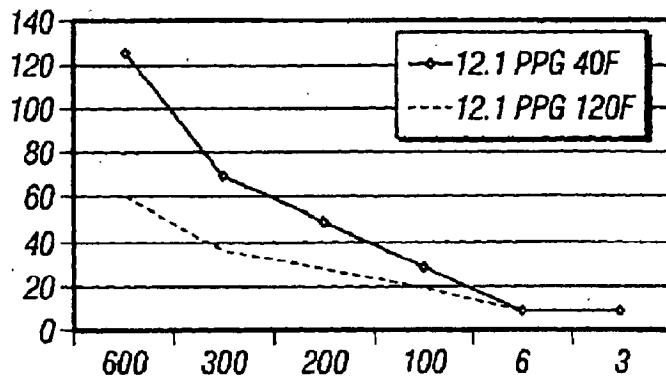


FIG. 9B

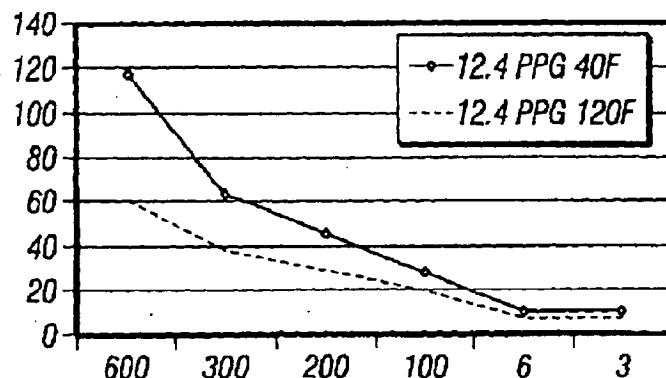


FIG. 9C

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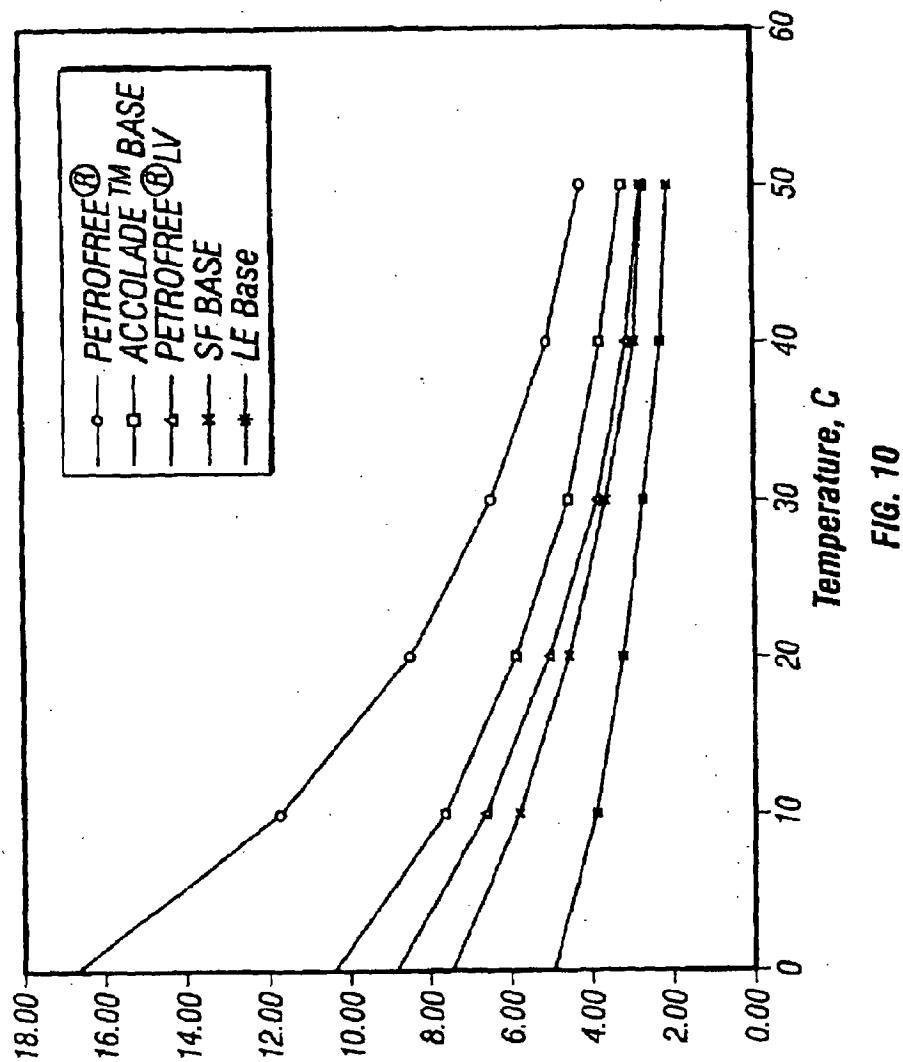


FIG. 10

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METHOD OF FORMULATING AND USING A DRILLING MUD WITH FRAGILE GELS**RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/929,465, filed Aug. 14, 2001, pending, and a continuation-in-part of International Patent Application Nos. PCT/US00/35609 and PCT/US00/35610, both filed Dec. 29, 2000, and pending under Chapter II of the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to compositions and methods for drilling, cementing and casing boreholes in subterranean formations, particularly hydrocarbon bearing formations. More particularly, the present invention relates to oil or synthetic fluid based drilling fluids and fluids comprising invert emulsions, such as, for example, fluids using esters, which combine high ecological compatibility with good stability and performance properties.

2. Description of Relevant Art

A drilling fluid or mud is a specially designed fluid that is circulated through a wellbore as the wellbore is being drilled to facilitate the drilling operation. The various functions of a drilling fluid include removing drill cuttings from the wellbore, cooling and lubricating the drill bit, aiding in support of the drill pipe and drill bit, and providing a hydrostatic head to maintain the integrity of the wellbore walls and prevent well blowouts. Specific drilling fluid systems are selected to optimize a drilling operation in accordance with the characteristics of a particular geological formation.

Oil or synthetic fluid-based muds are normally used to drill swelling or sloughing shales, salt, gypsum, anhydrite or other evaporite formations, hydrogen sulfide-containing formations, and hot (greater than about 300 degrees Fahrenheit) holes, but may be used in other holes penetrating a subterranean formation as well. Unless indicated otherwise, the terms "oil mud" or "oil-based mud or drilling fluid" shall be understood to include synthetic oils or other synthetic fluids as well as natural or traditional oils, and such oils shall be understood to comprise invert emulsions.

Oil-based muds used in drilling typically comprise: a base oil (or synthetic fluid) comprising the external phase of an invert emulsion; a saline, aqueous solution (typically a solution comprising about 30% calcium chloride) comprising the internal phase of the invert emulsion; emulsifiers at the interface of the internal and external phases; and other agents or additives for suspension, weight or density, oil-wetting, fluid loss or filtration control, and rheology control. Such additives commonly include organophilic clays and organophilic lignites. See H. C. H. Darley and George R. Gray, *Composition and Properties of Drilling and Completion Fluids* 66-67, 561-562 (5th ed. 1988). An oil-based or invert emulsion-based drilling fluid may commonly comprise between about 50:50 to about 95:5 by volume oil phase to water phase. An all oil mud simply comprises 100% oil by volume; that is, there is no aqueous internal phase.

Invert emulsion-based muds or drilling fluids comprise a key segment of the drilling fluids industry. However, increasingly invert emulsion-based drilling fluids have been subjected to greater environmental restrictions and performance and cost demands. There is consequently an increasing need and industry-wide interest in new drilling fluids

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that provide improved performance while still affording environmental acceptance.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a fluid and a method for drilling boreholes or wellbores in subterranean formations with reduced loss of drilling fluids or muds into the formation. This advantage of the invention is effected by formulating, providing or using a drilling fluid that forms a "fragile gel." A "gel" may be defined a number of ways. One definition indicates that a "gel" is a generally colloidal suspension or a mixture of microscopic water particles (and any hydrophilic additives) approximately uniformly dispersed through the oil (and any hydrophobic additives), such that the fluid or gel has a generally homogeneous gelatinous consistency. Another definition states that a "gel" is a colloid in a more solid form than a "sol" and defines a "sol" as a fluid colloidal system, especially one in which the continuous phase is a liquid. Still another definition provides that a "gel" is a colloid in which the disperse phase has combined with the continuous phase to produce a viscous jelly-like product. A gel has a structure that is continually building. If the yield stress of a fluid increases over time, the fluid has gels. Yield stress is the stress required to be exerted to initiate deformation.

A "fragile gel" as used herein is a "gel" that is easily disrupted or thinned, and that liquifies or becomes less gel-like and more liquid-like under stress, such as caused by moving the fluid, but which quickly returns to a gel when the movement or other stress is alleviated or removed, such as when circulation of the fluid is stopped, as for example when drilling is stopped. The "fragileness" of the "fragile gels" of the present invention contributes to the unique and surprising behavior and advantages of the present invention. The gels are so "fragile" that it is believed that they may be disrupted by a mere pressure wave or a compression wave during drilling. They seem to break instantaneously when disturbed, reversing from a gel back into a liquid form with minimum pressure, force and time and with less pressure, force and time than known to be required to convert prior art fluids from a gel-like state into a flowable state.

When drilling is stopped while using a drilling fluid of the present invention, and consequently the stresses or forces associated with drilling are substantially reduced or removed, the drilling fluid forms a gel structure that allows it to suspend drill cuttings and weighting materials for delivery to the well surface. The drilling fluid of the invention suspends drill cuttings through its gel or gel-like characteristics, without need for organophilic clays to add viscosity to the fluid. As a result, sag problems do not occur. Nevertheless, when drilling is resumed, the fragile gel is so easily and instantly converted back into a liquid or flowable state that no initial appreciable or noticeable pressure spike is observed with pressure-while-drilling (PWD) equipment or instruments. In contrast, such pressure spikes are commonly or normally seen when using prior art fluids.

Further, the drilling fluid of the invention generally maintains consistently low values for the difference in its surface density and its equivalent density downhole during drilling operations notwithstanding variations in the rate of drilling or penetration into the subterranean formation and notwithstanding other downhole stresses on the fluid. The fragile gels of the invention may be visco-elastic, contributing to their unique behavior and to the advantages of the invention.

The drilling fluid of the invention responds quickly to the addition of thinners, with thinning of the fluid occurring

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soon after the thinners are added, without need for multiple circulations of the fluid with the thinners additive or additives in the wellbore to show the effect of the addition of the thinners. The drilling fluid of the invention also yields flatter profiles between cold water and downhole rheologies, making the fluid advantageous for use in deep water wells. That is, the fluid may be thinned at cold temperatures without causing the fluid to be comparably thinned at higher temperatures. As used herein, the terms "deep water" with respect to wells and "higher" and "lower" with respect to temperature are relative terms understood by one skilled in the art of the oil and gas industry. However, generally, as used herein, "deep water wells" refers to any wells at water depths greater than about 1500 feet deep, "higher temperatures" means temperatures over about 120 degrees Fahrenheit and "lower temperatures" means temperatures at about 40 to about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Rheology of a drilling fluid is typically measured at about 120 or about 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

A method for preparing and using a drilling fluid of the invention is also provided by the invention. In the method, an invert emulsion drilling fluid is obtained or prepared that forms fragile gels or that has fragile gel behavior, preferably without the addition of organophilic clays or organophilic lignites, and that has as its base an invert emulsion composition. An example of a suitable base is a blend of esters with isomerized, or internal, olefins ("the ester blend") as described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/929,465, of Jeff Kirsner (co-inventor of the present invention), Kenneth W. Pober and Robert W. Pike, filed Aug. 14, 2001, entitled "Blends of Esters with Isomerized Olefins and Other Hydrocarbons as Base Oils for Invert Emulsion Oil Muds, incorporated herein by reference.

Drilling fluids of the present invention prepared with such ester blends provide an invert emulsion drilling fluid having significant benefits in terms of environmental acceptance or regulatory compliance while also improving oil mud rheology and overall oil mud performance. The esters in the blend may be any quantity, but preferably should comprise at least about 10 weight percent to about 99 weight percent of the blend and the olefins should preferably comprise about 1 weight percent to about 99 weight percent of the blend. The esters of the blend are preferably comprised of fatty acids and alcohols and most preferably about C₆ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol. Esters made other ways than with fatty acids and alcohols, such as for example, esters made from olefins combined with either fatty acids or alcohols, are also believed effective.

Further, the invert emulsion drilling fluid has added to or mixed with it other fluids or materials needed to comprise a complete drilling fluid. Such materials may include thinners or rheology control additives for example. However, preferably no organophilic clays are added to the drilling fluid for use in the invention. Characterization of the drilling fluid herein as "clayless" shall be understood to mean lacking organophilic clays. Although omission of organophilic clays is a radical departure from traditional teachings respecting preparation of drilling fluids, this omission of organophilic clays in the present invention allows the drilling fluid to have greater tolerance to drill solids (i.e., the properties of the fluid are not readily altered by the drill solids or cuttings) and is believed (without desiring to be limited by theory) to contribute to the fluid's superior properties in use as a drilling fluid.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) provide three graphs showing field data comparing mud losses incurred during drilling,

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running casing and cementing with a prior art isomerized olefin fluid and with a fluid of the present invention. FIG. 1(a) shows the total downhole losses; FIG. 1(b) shows the barrels lost per barrel of hole drilled; and FIG. 1(c) shows the barrels lost per foot.

FIG. 2 is a graph comparing mud loss incurred running casing and cementing in seven boreholes at various depths, where the mud used in the first three holes was a prior art isomerized olefin fluid and the mud used in the last four holes was a fluid of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a graph indicating gel formation in fluids of the present invention and their response when disrupted compared to some prior art isomerized olefin fluids.

FIG. 4 is a graph comparing the relaxation rates of various prior art drilling fluids and fluids of the present invention.

FIG. 5(a) is a graph comparing the differences in well surface density and the equivalent circulating density for a prior art isomerized olefin fluid and for the fluid of the invention in two comparable wells. FIG. 5(b) shows the rate of penetration in the wells at the time the density measurements for FIG. 5(a) were being taken.

FIG. 6 is a graph comparing the differences in well surface density and the equivalent circulating density for a fluid of the invention with a flowrate of 704 to 811 gallons per minute in a 12 1/4 inch borehole drilled from 9,192 ft to 13,510 ft in deep water and including rate of penetration.

FIG. 7 is a graph comparing the differences in well surface density and the equivalent circulating density for a fluid of the invention with a flowrate of 158 to 174 gallons per minute in a 6 1/2 inch borehole drilled from 12,306 ft to 13,992 ft and including rate of penetration.

FIG. 8 is a graph comparing the differences in well surface density and the equivalent circulating density for a fluid of the invention at varying drilling rates from 4,672 ft to 12,250 ft, and a flowrate of 522 to 586 gallons per minute in a 9 1/4" borehole.

FIG. 9(a) is a bar graph comparing the yield point of two densities of a fluid of the invention at standard testing temperatures of 40 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit. FIGS. 9(b) and (c) are graphs of the Fann instrument dial readings for these same two densities of a fluid of the invention over a range of shear rates at standard testing temperatures of 40 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

FIG. 10 is a graph comparing the viscosity of various known invert emulsion bases for drilling fluids with the invert emulsion base for a drilling fluid of the present invention.

50 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention has been tested in the field and the field data demonstrates the advantageous performance of the fluid composition of the invention and the method of using it. As illustrated in FIGS. 1(a), (b), (c), and 2, the present invention provides an invert emulsion drilling fluid that may be used in drilling boreholes or wellbores in subterranean formations, and in other drilling operations in such formations (such as in casing and cementing wells), without significant loss of drilling fluid when compared to drilling operations with prior art fluids.

FIGS. 1(a), (b), and (c) show three graphs comparing the actual fluid loss experienced in drilling 10 wells in the same subterranean formation. In nine of the wells, an isomerized olefin based fluid (in this case, tradename PETROFREE® SF available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in

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Houston, Tex.), viewed as an industry "standard" for full compliance with current environmental regulations, was used. In one well, an ACCOLADE™ system, a fluid having the features or characteristics of the invention and commercially available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex. (and also fully complying with current environmental regulations) was used. The hole drilled with an ACCOLADE™ system was 12.25 inches in diameter. The holes drilled with the "standard" PETROFREE® SF fluid were about 12 inches in diameter with the exception of two sidetrack holes that were about 8.5 inches in diameter. FIG. 1(a) shows the total number of barrels of fluid lost in drilling, running, casing and cementing the holes. FIG. 1(b) shows the total number of barrels of fluid lost per barrel of hole drilled. FIG. 1(c) shows the total number of barrels of fluid lost per foot of well drilled, cased or cemented. For each of these wells graphed in these FIGS. 1(a), (b) and (c), the drilling fluid (or mud) lost when using a fluid of the invention was remarkably lower than when using the prior art fluid.

FIG. 2 compares the loss of mud with the two drilling fluids in running casing and cementing at different well depths in the same subterranean formation. The prior art isomerized olefin based fluid was used in the first three wells shown on the bar chart and a fluid of the present invention was used in the next four wells shown on the bar chart. Again, the reduction in loss of fluid when using the fluid of the present invention was remarkable.

The significant reduction in mud loss seen with the present invention is believed to be due at least in substantial part to the fragile gel behavior of the fluid of the present invention and to the chemical structure of the fluid that contributes to, causes, or results in that fragile gel behavior. According to the present invention, fluids having fragile gels or fragile gel behavior provide significant reduction in mud loss during drilling (and casing and cementing) operations when compared to mud losses incurred with other drilling fluids that do not have fragile gel behavior. Without wishing to be limited by theory, it is believed, for example, that the structure of the drilling fluids of the invention, that is, the fragile gel structure, contributing to the fragile gel behavior results in lower surge and swab pressure while running casing which in turn results in lower mud loss during such casing operations. Thus, according to the method of the invention, drilling fluid loss may be reduced by employing a drilling fluid in drilling operations that is formulated to comprise fragile gels or to exhibit fragile gel behavior. As used herein, the term "drilling operations" shall mean drilling, running casing and/or cementing unless indicated otherwise.

FIG. 3 represents in graphical form data indicating gel formation in samples of two different weight (12.65 and 15.6 ppg) ACCOLADE® fluids of the present invention and two comparably weighted (12.1 and 15.6 ppg) prior art invert emulsion fluids (tradename PETROFREE® SF) at 120 degrees Fahrenheit. When the fluids are at rest or static (as when drilling has stopped in the wellbore), the curves are flat or relatively flat (see area at about 50-65 minutes elapsed time for example). When shear stress is resumed (as in drilling), the curves move up straight vertically or generally vertically (see area at about 68 to about 80 elapsed minutes for example), with the height of the curve being proportional to the amount of gel formed—the higher the curve the more gel built up. The curves then fall down and level out or begin to level out, with the faster rate at which the horizontal line

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forms (and the closer the horizontal line approximates true horizontal) indicating the lesser resistance of the fluid to the stress and the lower the pressure required to move the fluid.

FIG. 3 indicates superior response and performance by the drilling fluids of the present invention. Not only do the fluids of the present invention build up more gel when at rest, which enables the fluids of the invention to better maintain weight materials and drill cuttings in suspension when at rest—a time prior art fluids are more likely to have difficulty suspending such solid materials—but the fluids of the present invention nevertheless surprisingly provide less resistance to the shear, which will result in lower ECDs as will be discussed further below.

FIG. 4 provides data further showing the gel or gel-like behavior of the fluids of the present invention. FIG. 4 is a graph of the relaxation rates of various drilling fluids, including fluids of the present invention and prior art isomerized olefin based fluids. In the test, conducted at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, the fluids are exposed to stress and then the stress is removed. The time required for the fluids to relax or to return to their pre-stressed state is recorded. The curves for the fluids of the invention seem to level out over time whereas the prior art fluids continue to decline. The leveling out of the curves are believed to indicate that the fluids are returning to a true gel or gel-like structure.

The significant reduction in mud loss seen with the present invention is also believed to be due in substantial part to the suspected viscoelasticity of the fluid of the present invention. Such viscoelasticity, along with the fragile gel behavior, is believed to enable the fluid of the invention to minimize the difference in its density at the surface and its equivalent circulating density downhole. This difference in a drilling fluid's measured surface density at the well head and the drilling fluid's equivalent circulating density downhole (as typically measured during drilling by downhole pressure-while-drilling (PWD) equipment) is often called "ECD" in the industry. Low "ECDs", that is, a minimal difference in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities, is critical in drilling deep water wells and other wells where the differences in subterranean formation pore pressures and fracture gradients are small.

Table 1 below and FIG. 5(a) showing the Table 1 data in graph form illustrate the consistently stable and relatively minimal difference in equivalent circulating density and actual mud weight or well surface density for the fluids of the invention. This minimal difference is further illustrated in FIG. 5(a) and in Table I by showing the equivalent circulating density downhole for a commercially available isomerized olefin drilling fluid in comparison to the drilling fluid of the present invention. Both fluids had the same well surface density. The difference in equivalent circulating density and well surface density for the prior art fluid however was consistently greater than such difference for the fluid of the invention. FIG. 5(b) provides the rates of penetration or drilling rates at the time the measurements graphed in FIG. 5(a) were made. FIG. 5(b) indicates that the fluid of the invention provided its superior performance—low ECDs—at surprisingly faster drilling rates, making its performance even more impressive, as faster drilling rates tend to increase ECDs with prior art fluids.

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TABLE 1

| DEPTH (in feet) | Comparison of Equivalent Circulating Densities | | |
|--------------------|--|--|---|
| | PWD Data ACCOLADE™ System | | PWD Data Isomerized Olefin based fluid pump rate: 936 gpm BIT: 12.25" |
| | pump rate: 934 gpm BIT: 12.25" | Mud Weight At well surface (ppg) | |
| 10,600 | 12.29 | 12.0 | 12.51 |
| 10,704 | 12.37 | 12.0 | 12.53 |
| 10,798 | 12.52 | 12.0 | 12.72 |
| 10,899 | 12.50 | 12.2 | 12.70 |
| 11,001 | 12.50 | 12.2 | 12.64 |
| 11,105 | 12.52 | 12.2 | 12.70 |
| 11,200 | 12.50 | 12.2 | 12.69 |
| 11,301 | 12.55 | 12.2 | 12.70 |
| 11,400 | 12.55 | 12.2 | 12.71 |
| 11,500 | 12.59 | 12.2 | 12.77 |
| 11,604 | 12.59 | 12.2 | 12.79 |
| 11,700 | 12.57 | 12.2 | 12.79 |
| 11,802 | 12.60 | 12.2 | 12.79 |
| 11,902 | 12.62 | 12.2 | 12.81 |
| 12,000 | 12.64 | 12.2 | 12.83 |
| 12,101 | 12.77 | 12.2 | 12.99 |
| 12,200 | 12.77 | 12.3 | 12.99 |
| 12,301 | 12.76 | 12.3 | 13.01 |

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points at higher temperatures, as traditional or prior art oils tend to thin or have reduced viscosity as temperatures increase. In contrast, the fluid of the invention can be thinned at lower temperatures without significantly affecting the viscosity of the fluid at higher temperatures. This feature or characteristic of the invention is a further indicator that the invention will provide good performance as a drilling fluid and will provide low ECDs. Moreover, this characteristic indicates the ability of the fluid to maintain viscosity at higher temperatures.

FIG. 10 compares the viscosity of a base fluid for comprising a drilling fluid of the present invention with known base fluids of some prior art invert emulsion drilling fluids. The base fluid for the drilling fluid of the present invention is one of the thickest or most viscous. Yet when comprising a drilling fluid of the invention, the drilling fluid has low ECDs, provides good suspension of drill cuttings, satisfactory particle plugging and minimal fluid loss in use. Such surprising advantages of the drilling fluids of the invention are believed to be facilitated in part by a synergy or compatibility of the base fluid with appropriate thinners for the fluid.

Thinners disclosed in International Patent Application Nos. PCT/US00/35609 and PCT/US00/35610 of Halliburton Energy Services, Inc., Cognis Deutschland GmbH & Co KG., Heinz Muller, Jeff Kirsner (co-inventor of the present invention) and Kimberly Burrows (co-inventor of the present invention), both filed Dec. 29, 2000 and entitled "Thinners for Invert Emulsions," and both incorporated herein by reference, are particularly useful in the present invention for effecting such "selective thinning" of the fluid of the present invention; that is thinning at lower temperatures without rendering the fluid too thin at higher temperatures. Such thinners may have the following general formula: $R-(C_2H_4O)_n(C_3H_6O)_m(C_4H_8O)_k-H$ ("formula I"), where R is a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched alkyl radical having about 8 to about 24 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10. Preferably, R has about 8 to about 18 carbon atoms; more preferably, R has about 12 to about 18 carbon atoms; and most preferably, R has about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms. Also, most preferably, R is saturated and linear.

The thinner may be added to the drilling fluid during initial preparation of the fluid or later as the fluid is being used for drilling or well service purposes in the formation. The quantity added is an effective amount to maintain or effect the desired viscosity of the drilling fluid. For purposes of this invention, an "effective amount" of thinner of formula (I) is preferably from about 0.5 to about 15 pounds per barrel of drilling fluid or mud. A more preferred amount of thinner ranges from about 1 to about 5 pounds per barrel of drilling fluid and a most preferred amount is about 1.5 to about 3 pounds thinner per barrel of drilling fluid.

The compositions or compounds of formula (I) may be prepared by customary techniques of alkoxylation, such as alkoxyating the corresponding fatty alcohols with ethylene oxide and/or propylene oxide or butylene oxide under pressure and in the presence of acidic or alkaline catalysts as is known in the art. Such alkoxylation may take place blockwise, i.e., the fatty alcohol may be reacted first with ethylene oxide, propylene oxide or butylene oxide and subsequently, if desired, with one or more of the other alkylene oxides. Alternatively, such alkoxylation may be conducted randomly, in which any desired mixture of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide is reacted with the fatty alcohol.

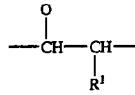
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In formula (I), the subscripts n and m respectively represent the number of ethylene oxide (EO) and propylene oxide (PO) molecules or groups in one molecule of the alkoxyated fatty alcohol. The subscript k indicates the number of butylene oxide (BO) molecules or groups. The subscripts n, m, and k need not be integers, since they indicate in each case statistical averages of the alkoxylation. Included without limitation are those compounds of the formula (I) whose ethoxy, propoxy, and/or butoxy group distribution is very narrow, such as for example, "narrow range ethoxylates" also called "NREs" by those skilled in the art.

To accomplish the purposes of this invention, the compound of formula (I) must contain at least one ethoxy group. Preferably, the compound of formula I will also contain at least one propoxy group (C_3H_6O-) or butoxy group (C_4H_8O-). Mixed alkoxides containing all three alkoxide groups—ethylene oxide, propylene oxide, and butylene oxide—are possible for the invention but are not preferred.

Preferably, for use according to this invention, the compound of formula (I) will have a value for m ranging from about 1 to about 10 with k zero or a value for k ranging from about 1 to about 10 with m zero. Most preferably, m will be about 1 to about 10 and k will be zero.

Alternatively, such thinners may be a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:



("formula II") where R_1 is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR_2 , where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms. A formula (II) thinner may be used alone or may be used in combination with a formula (I) thinner or co-thinner.

Preferred commercially available thinners include, for example, products having the tradenames COLDTROL® (alcohol derivative), OMC2™ (oligomeric fatty acid), ATC® (modified fatty acid ester), to be used alone or in combination, and available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex.

The formulations of the fluids of the invention, and also the formulations of the prior art isomerized olefin based drilling fluids, used in drilling the boreholes cited in the data above, vary with the particular requirements of the subterranean formation. Table 3 below, however, provides example-formulations and properties for these two types of fluids discussed in the field data above. All trademarked products in Table 3 are available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex., including: LE MUL™ emulsion stabilizer (a blend of oxidized tall oil and polyami-

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nated fatty acid); LE SUPERMUL™ emulsifier (polyaminated fatty acid); DURATONE® HT filtration control agent (organophilic leonardite); ADAPTA® HP filtration control agent (copolymer particularly suited for providing HPHT filtration control in non-aqueous fluid systems); RHEMOD L™ suspension agent/viscosifier (modified fatty acid); GELTONE® II viscosifier (organophilic clay); VIS-PLUS® suspension agent (carboxylic acid); BAROID® weighting agent (ground barium sulfate); and DEEP-TREAT® wetting agent/thinner (sulfonated sodium salt). In determining the properties in Table 3, samples of the fluids were sheared in a Silverson commercial blender at 7,000 rpm for 10 minutes, rolled at 150 degrees Fahrenheit for 16 hours, and stirred for 10 minutes. Measurements were taken with the fluids at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, except where indicated otherwise.

TABLE 3

| Fluids and Compounds | ACCOLADE™ System | Isomerized Olefin Based Invert Emulsion Drilling Fluid |
|---|------------------|--|
| Example Formulations | | |
| ACCOLADE™ Base (bbl) | 0.590 | — |
| SF™ Base (bbl) | — | 0.568 |
| LE MUL™ ¹ (lb) | — | 4 |
| LE SUPERMUL™ ² (lb) | 10 | 6 |
| Lime (lb) | 1 | 4 |
| DURATONE® HT ³ (lb) | — | 4 |
| Freshwater (bbl) | 0.263 | 0.254 |
| ADAPTA® HP ⁴ (lb) | 2 | — |
| RHEMOD L™ ⁵ (lb) | 1 | — |
| GELTONE® II ⁶ (lb) | — | 5 |
| VIS-PLUS ⁷ (lb) | — | 1.5 |
| BAROID® ⁸ (lb) | 138 | 138 |
| Calcium chloride (lb) | 32 | 31 |
| DEEP-TREAT ⁹ (lb) | — | 2 |
| B. Properties | | |
| Plastic Viscosity (cP) | 19 | 19 |
| Yield Point (lb/100 ft ²) | 13 | 14 |
| 10 second gel (lb/100 ft ²) | 9 | 7 |
| 10 minute gel (lb/100 ft ²) | 12 | 9 |
| HPHT Temperature (° F) | 225 | 200 |
| HPHT @ 500 psid (mL) | 0.8 | 1.2 |
| Electrical stability (volts) | 185 | 380 |
| Fan™ Dial Readings: | | |
| 600 rpm | 51 | 52 |
| 300 rpm | 32 | 33 |
| 200 rpm | 25 | 26 |
| 100 rpm | 18 | 18 |
| 6 rpm | 7 | 7 |
| 3 rpm | 5 | 6 |

¹Blend of oxidized tall oil and polyaminated fatty acid emulsion stabilizer.

²Polyaminated fatty acid emulsifier.

³Organophilic leonardite filtration control agent.

⁴Copolymer HTHP filtration control agent for non-aqueous systems.

⁵Modified fatty acid suspension agent/viscosifier.

⁶Organophilic clay viscosifier.

⁷Carboxylic acid suspension agent.

⁸Ground barium sulfate weighting agent.

⁹Sulfonated sodium salt wetting agent/thinner.

The present invention is directed to using invert emulsion based drilling fluids that contain fragile gels or exhibit fragile gel behavior in drilling operations, such as drilling, running casing, and cementing. The present invention is also directed to reducing the loss of drilling fluids or drilling muds during such drilling operations by employing invert emulsion based drilling fluids that contain fragile gels or exhibit fragile gel behavior, and that preferably provide low ECDs.

The invert emulsion drilling fluids of the present invention have an invert emulsion base. This base is not limited

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to a single formulation. Test data discussed above is from example invert emulsion drilling fluids of the invention comprising a blend of one or more esters and one or more isomerized, or internal, olefins ("ester blend") such as described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/929,465, of Jeff Kirsner (co-inventor of the present invention), Kenneth W. Pober and Robert W. Pike, filed Aug. 14, 2001, entitled "Blends of Esters with Isomerized Olefins and Other Hydrocarbons as Base Oils for Invert Emulsion Oil Muds," incorporated herein by reference. In such blend, preferably the esters will comprise at least about 10 weight percent of the blend and may comprise up to about 99 weight percent of the blend, although the esters may be used in any quantity. Preferred esters for blending are comprised of about C₆ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and alcohols, and are particularly or more preferably disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. Re. 36,066, reissued Jan. 25, 1999 as a reissue of U.S. Pat. No. 5,232,910, assigned to Henkel KgaA of Dusseldorf, Germany, and Baroid Limited of London, England, and in U.S. Pat. No. 5,252,554, issued Oct. 12, 1993, and assigned to Henkel Kommanditgesellschaft auf Aktien of Dusseldorf, Germany and Baroid Limited of Aberdeen, Scotland. Esters disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,106,516, issued Apr. 21, 1992, and U.S. Pat. No. 5,318,954, issued Jun. 7, 1984, both assigned to 25 Henkel Kommanditgesellschaft auf Aktien, of Dusseldorf, Germany, may also be used. The most preferred esters for use in the invention are comprised of about C₁₂ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or about C₈ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol. These most preferred esters are available 30 commercially under tradenames PETROFREE® and PETROFREE LV™, respectively, from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex. Although esters made with fatty acids and alcohols are preferred, esters made other ways, such as from combining olefins with either fatty acids 35 or alcohols, may also be effective.

Isomerized, or internal, olefins for blending with the esters for an ester blend may be any such olefins, straight chain, branched, or cyclic, preferably having about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms. Isomerized, or internal, olefins 40 having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C₁₆ and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C₁₈ are especially preferred. An example of an isomerized olefin for use in an ester blend in the invention that is commercially available is SF™ Base fluid, available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in 45 Houston, Tex. Alternatively, other hydrocarbons such as paraffins, mineral oils, glyceride triesters, or combinations thereof may be substituted for or added to the olefins in the ester blend. Such other hydrocarbons may comprise from about 1 weight percent to about 99 weight percent of such 50 blend.

Invert emulsion drilling fluids may be prepared comprising SF™ Base without the ester, however, such fluids are not believed to provide the superior properties of fluids of the invention with the ester. Field data discussed above has 55 demonstrated that the fluids of the invention are superior to prior art isomerized olefin based drilling fluids, and the fluids of the invention have properties especially advantageous in subterranean wells drilled in deep water. Moreover, it is believed that the principles of the method of the invention may be used with invert emulsion drilling fluids that form fragile gels or yield fragile gel behavior, provide low ECDs, and have (or seem to have) viscoelasticity that 60 may not be comprised of an ester blend. One example of such a fluid may comprise a polar solvent instead of an ester blend.

Other examples of possible suitable invert emulsion bases for the drilling fluids of the present invention include

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isomerized olefins blended with other hydrocarbons such as linear alpha olefins, paraffins, or naphthenes, or combinations thereof ("hydrocarbon blends").

Paraffins for use in blends comprising invert emulsions for drilling fluids for the present invention may be linear, branched, poly-branched, cyclic, or isoparaffins, preferably having about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms. When blended with esters or other hydrocarbons such as isomerized olefins, linear alpha olefins, or naphthenes in the invention, the paraffins should comprise at least about 1 weight percent to about 99 weight percent of the blend, but preferably less than about 50 weight percent. An example of a commercially available paraffin suited for blends useful in the invention is called tradename XP-07™, available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex. XP-07™ is primarily a C₁₂₋₁₆ linear paraffin.

Examples of glyceride triesters for ester/hydrocarbon blends useful in blends comprising invert emulsions for drilling fluids for the present invention may include without limitation materials such as rapeseed oil, olive oil, canola oil, castor oil, coconut oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, lard oil, linseed oil, neatsfoot oil, palm oil, peanut oil, perilla oil, rice bran oil, safflower oil, sardine oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, and sunflower oil.

Naphthenes or naphthenic hydrocarbons for use in blends comprising invert emulsions for drilling fluids for the present invention may be any saturated, cycloparaffinic compound, composition or material with a chemical formula of C_nH_{2n}, where n is a number about 5 to about 30.

In still another embodiment, a hydrocarbon blend might be blended with an ester blend to comprise an invert emulsion base for a drilling fluid of the present invention.

The exact proportions of the components comprising an ester blend (or other blend or base for an invert emulsion) for use in the present invention will vary depending on drilling requirements (and characteristics needed for the blend or base to meet those requirements), supply and availability of the components, cost of the components, and characteristics of the blend or base necessary to meet environmental regulations or environmental acceptance. The manufacture of the various components of the ester blend (or other invert emulsion base) will be understood by one skilled in the art.

Further, the invert emulsion drilling fluid of the invention or for use in the present invention has added to it or mixed with the invert emulsion base, other fluids or materials needed to comprise a complete drilling fluid. Such materials may include for example additives to reduce or control temperature rheology or to provide thinning, such as, for example, additives having the tradename COLDTROL®, RHEMOD L™, ATC®, and OMC2™; additives for providing temporary increased viscosity for shipping (transport to the well site) and for use in sweeps, such as, for example an additive having the tradename TEMPERUST™ (modified fatty acid); additives for filtration control, such as, for example additives having the tradename ADAPTA HP®; additives for high temperature high pressure control (HTHP) and emulsion stability, such as, for example, additives having the tradename FACTANT™ (highly concentrated tall oil derivative); and additives for emulsification, such as, for example additives having the tradename LE SUPER-MUL™ (polyaminated fatty acid). Blends of thinners such as the OMC2™, COLDTROL®, and ATC® thinners can be more effective in fluids of the invention than a single one of these thinners. All of the aforementioned trademarked products are available from Halliburton Energy Services, Inc. in Houston, Tex., U.S.A.

The invert emulsion drilling fluid of the present invention preferably does not have added to it any organophilic clays.

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The fluid of the invention does not need organophilic clay or organophilic lignites to provide it needed viscosity, suspension characteristics, or filtration control to carry drill cuttings to the well surface. Moreover, the lack of organophilic clays and organophilic lignites in the fluid is believed to enhance the tolerance of the fluid to the drill cuttings. That is, the lack of organophilic clays and organophilic lignites in the fluid of the invention is believed to enable the fluid to suspend and carry drill cuttings without significant change in the fluid's rheological properties.

The foregoing description of the invention is intended to be a description of preferred embodiments. Various changes in the details of the described fluids and method of use can be made without departing from the intended scope of this invention as defined by the appended claims.

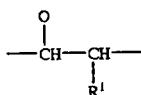
We claim:

1. A method for conducting a drilling operation in a subterranean formation using a fragile gel drilling fluid comprising:
 - (a) an invert emulsion base;
 - (b) one or more thinners;
 - (c) one or more emulsifiers; and
 - (d) one or more weighting agents, wherein said operation includes running casing in a borehole.
2. A method for conducting a drilling operation in a subterranean formation using a fragile gel drilling fluid comprising:
 - (a) an invert emulsion base;
 - (b) one or more thinners;
 - (c) one or more emulsifiers; and
 - (d) one or more weighting agents, wherein said drilling fluid is visco-elastic.
3. A method for drilling a borehole in a subterranean formation using a fragile gel drilling fluid comprising:
 - (a) an invert emulsion base;
 - (b) one or more thinners;
 - (c) one or more emulsifiers; and
 - (d) one or more weighting agents, wherein said drilling is in deep water and the ECDs are less than about 0.5.
4. A drilling fluid comprising:
 - (a) a continuous invert emulsion base comprising a blend of esters and olefins, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C₁₂ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol, about C₈ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol, and combinations thereof, and said olefins are selected from the group consisting of isomerized olefins and internal olefins each having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C₁₆ and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C₁₈;
 - (b) one or more thinners derived from fatty acids; wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of thinners having the following general formula: R—(C₂H₄)_n(C₃H₆O)_m(C₄H₈O)_k—H, where R is a saturated, linear alkyl radical having about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10;

thinners comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide with C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acids or C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:

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where R_1 is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR_2 , where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula: 10



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where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms; and combinations thereof; 20

- (c) one or more emulsifiers derived from fatty acids;
- (d) one or more weighting agents; and
- (e) at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology. 25

5. A fragile gel drilling fluid comprising:

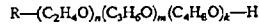
- (a) an invert emulsion base;
- (b) one or more thinners;
- (c) one or more emulsifiers; and
- (d) one or more weighting agents, wherein said fluid is visco-elastic. 30

6. The method of claim 1 wherein said invert emulsion has a continuous base comprised of at least one component selected from at least one of the following groups:

- (i) esters prepared from fatty acids and alcohols, esters prepared from olefins and fatty acids or alcohols;
- (ii) olefins comprising linear alpha olefins, isomerized olefins having a straight chain, olefins having a branched structure, isomerized olefins having a cyclic structure, olefin hydrocarbons;
- (iii) paraffin hydrocarbons comprising linear paraffins, branched paraffins, poly-branched paraffins, cyclic paraffins, isoparaffins;
- (iv) mineral oil hydrocarbons;
- (v) glyceride triesters comprising rapeseed oil, olive oil, canola oil, castor oil, coconut oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, lard oil, linseed oil, neatsfoot oil, palm oil, peanut oil, perilla oil, rice bran oil, safflower oil, sardine oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil; and
- (vi) naphthenic hydrocarbons.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said thinner is selected from the group consisting of:

- (i) a compound having the formula:

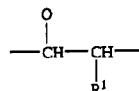


where R is a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched alkyl radical having about 8 to about 24 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10; and

- (ii) a non-ionic surfactant, said surfactant being the reaction product of at least one oxide, selected from the

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group consisting of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and butylene oxide, with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9, 10, 13, or 14 having structural units of the general formula:



where R_1 is a hydrogen atom, or an OH group, or a group OR_2 and where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms, or a group of the formula: 10



and where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms, or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms. 20

8. The method of claim 1 wherein said fragile gel drilling fluid is also used in drilling said borehole.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said fragile gel is a structure capable of suspending drill cuttings at rest and that may be immediately disrupted by movement of said fluid. 30

10. The method of claim 8 wherein said fragile gel reverts to a flowable or liquid state immediately upon resumption of drilling after a period of rest.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein no appreciable pressure spike is observed by pressure-while-drilling equipment when said drilling is resumed.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein said thinner reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at lower temperatures to a greater extent than it reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at higher temperatures. 35

13. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid has a lower yield point at lower temperatures than at higher temperatures.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid is visco-elastic.

15. The method of claim 8 wherein the equivalent circulating density of said drilling fluid approximates the surface density of said drilling fluid.

16. The method of claim 8 wherein the ECDs are less than about 0.5.

17. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling is in deep water.

18. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling fluid is tolerant to contaminants, wherein said contaminants comprise drill cuttings from said drilling.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein said fluid does not exhibit sag when at rest.

20. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid is substantially free of organophilic clay.

21. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling is conducted without significant loss of drilling fluid.

22. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling fluid does not require organophilic clays to provide filtration control.

23. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling fluid demonstrates lower differences in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities at faster drilling rates. 65

24. The method of claim 8 wherein said drilling is at different rates and said drilling fluid maintains a low differ-

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ence in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities over said different drilling rates.

25. The method of claim 1 wherein said base comprises a blend of esters with isomerized or internal olefins.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein said esters comprise at least about 10 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein said olefins comprise about 1 wt % to about 99 weight percent of said blend.

28. The method of claim 25 wherein said olefins have about 40 wt % to about 70 wt % C₁₆ and about 20 wt % to about 50 wt % C₁₈.

29. The method of claim 25 wherein said esters comprise about C₆ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol.

30. The method of claim 6 wherein said straight-chain, branched, and cyclic olefins each have about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

31. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a blend of esters with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of paraffins, mineral oils, glyceride triesters, and combinations thereof.

32. The method of claim 31 wherein said other hydrocarbons comprise from about 1 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

33. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid is ester-free.

34. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a polar solvent.

35. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises isomerized olefins blended with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of linear alpha olefins, paraffins, naphthenes, and combinations thereof.

36. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffin hydrocarbons having about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

37. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffins blended with mineral oils or glyceride triesters.

38. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises naphthenes selected from the group consisting of saturated, cycloparaffinic compounds, compositions and materials having a chemical formula of C_nH_{2n}, wherein n is a number about 5 to about 30.

39. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises at least one additive selected from the group consisting of rheology control agents, viscosifiers, filtration control agents, and HTHP additives.

40. The method of claim 39 wherein said drilling fluid incorporates said additive or additives quickly.

41. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a base blend of esters and olefins, and said thinners and emulsifiers are derived from fatty acids, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C₁₂ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or about C₈ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol and said olefins are isomerized, or internal, olefins having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C₁₆ and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C₁₈, and wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of:

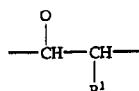
thinners having the following general formula:

R—C₂H₄O_n(C₃H₆O)_m(C₄H₈O)_k—H, where R is a saturated, linear alkyl radical having about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10;

thinners comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide

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and/or butylene oxide with C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acids or C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:



where R₁ is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR₂, where R₂ is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



where R₃ is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms;

and combinations thereof;

and wherein said drilling fluid further comprises at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology.

42. The method of claim 1 wherein said drilling fluid forms a structure that is capable of suspending drill cuttings at rest and that is instantaneously disruptible by movement.

43. The method of claim 2 wherein said invert emulsion has a continuous base comprised of at least one component selected from at least one of the following groups:

(i) esters prepared from fatty acids and alcohols, esters prepared from olefins and fatty acids or alcohols;

(ii) olefins comprising linear alpha olefins, isomerized olefins having a straight chain, olefins having a branched structure, isomerized olefins having a cyclic structure; olefin hydrocarbons;

(ii) paraffin hydrocarbons comprising linear paraffins, branched paraffins, poly-branched paraffins, cyclic paraffins, isoparaffins;

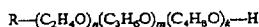
(iii) mineral oil hydrocarbons;

(iv) glyceride triesters comprising rapeseed oil, olive oil, canola oil, castor oil, coconut oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, lard oil, linseed oil, neatsfoot oil, palm oil, peanut oil, perilla oil, rice bran oil, safflower oil, sardine oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil; and

(v) naphthenic hydrocarbons.

44. The method of claim 2 wherein said thinner is selected from the group consisting of:

(i) a compound having the formula:



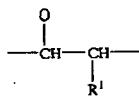
where R is a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched alkyl radical having about 8 to about 24 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10; and

(ii) a non-ionic surfactant, said surfactant being the reaction product of at least one oxide, selected from the

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group consisting of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and butylene oxide, with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9, 10, 13, or 14 having structural units of the general formula:



where R_1 is a hydrogen atom, or an OH group, or a group OR_2 and where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms, or a group of the formula:



and where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms, or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms.

45. The method of claim 2 said operation includes drilling a borehole.

46. The method of claim 2 wherein said operation includes cementing a borehole.

47. The method of claim 45 wherein said fragile gel is a structure capable of suspending drill cuttings that may be immediately disrupted by movement of said fluid.

48. The method of claim 45 wherein said fragile gel reverts to a flowable or liquid state immediately upon resumption of drilling after a period of rest.

49. The method of claim 45 wherein no appreciable pressure spike is observed by pressure-while-drilling equipment when said drilling is resumed.

50. The method of claim 2 wherein said thinner reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at lower temperatures to a greater extent than it reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at higher temperatures.

51. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid maintains its viscosity at higher temperatures.

52. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid has a lower yield point at lower temperatures than at higher temperatures.

53. The method of claim 2 wherein the equivalent circulating density of said drilling fluid approximates the surface density of said drilling fluid.

54. The method of claim 2 wherein the ECDs are less than about 0.5.

55. The method of claim 45 wherein said drilling is in deep water.

56. The method of claim 45 wherein said fluid is tolerant to contaminants, wherein said contaminants comprise drill cuttings from said drilling.

57. The method of claim 2 wherein said fluid does not exhibit sag when at rest.

58. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid is substantially free of organophilic clay.

59. The method of claim 45 wherein said drilling is conducted without significant loss of drilling fluid.

60. The method of claim 45 wherein said drilling fluid does not require organophilic clays to provide filtration control.

61. The method of claim 45 wherein said drilling fluid demonstrates lower differences in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities at faster drilling rates.

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62. The method of claim 45 wherein said drilling is at different rates and said drilling fluid maintains a low difference in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities over said different drilling rates.

63. The method of claim 2 wherein said base comprises a blend of esters with isomerized or internal olefins.

64. The method of claim 63 wherein said esters comprise at least about 10 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

65. The method of claim 63 wherein said olefins comprise about 1 wt % to about 99 weight percent of said blend.

66. The method of claim 63 wherein said olefins have about 40 wt % to about 70 wt % C_{16} and about 20 wt % to about 50 wt % C_{18} .

67. The method of claim 63 wherein said esters comprise about C_6 to about C_{14} fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol.

68. The method of claim 43 wherein said straight-chain, branched, and cyclic olefins each have about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

69. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a blend of esters with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of paraffins, mineral oils, glyceride triesters, and combinations thereof.

70. The method of claim 69 wherein said other hydrocarbons comprise from about 1 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

71. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid is ester-free.

72. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a polar solvent.

73. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises isomerized olefins blended with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of linear alpha olefins, paraffins, naphthenes, and combinations thereof.

74. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffin hydrocarbons having about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

75. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffins blended with mineral oils or glyceride triesters.

76. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises naphthenes selected from the group consisting of saturated, cycloparaffinic compounds, compositions and materials having a chemical formula of C_nH_{2n} , wherein n is a number about 5 to about 30.

77. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises at least one additive selected from the group consisting of rheology control agents, viscosifiers, filtration control agents, and HTHP additives.

78. The method of claim 76 wherein said drilling fluid incorporates said additive or additives quickly.

79. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a base blend of esters and olefins, and said thinners and emulsifiers are derived from fatty acids, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C_{12} to about C_{14} fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or about C_8 fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol and said olefins are isomerized, or internal, olefins having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C_{16} and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C_{18} and wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of:

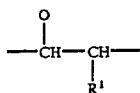
thinners having the following general formula:

$R-(C_2H_4O)_n(C_3H_6O)_m(C_4H_8O)_k-H$, where R is a saturated, linear alkyl radical having about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10;

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thinner comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having 5 units of the general formula:



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where R_1 is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR_2 , where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



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where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms;

and combinations thereof;

and wherein said drilling fluid further comprises at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology.

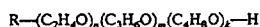
80. The method of claim 2 wherein said drilling fluid forms a structure that is capable of suspending drill cuttings at rest and that is instantaneously disruptible by movement.

81. The method of claim 3 wherein said invert emulsion has a continuous base comprised of at least one component selected from at least one of the following groups:

- (i) esters prepared from fatty acids and alcohols, esters prepared from olefins and fatty acids or alcohols;
- (ii) olefins comprising linear alpha olefins, isomerized olefins having a straight chain, olefins having a branched structure, isomerized olefins having a cyclic structure; olefin hydrocarbons;
- (iii) paraffin hydrocarbons comprising linear paraffins, branched paraffins, poly-branched paraffins, cyclic paraffins, isoparaffins;
- (iv) mineral oil hydrocarbons;
- (v) glyceride triesters comprising rapeseed oil, olive oil, canola oil, castor oil, coconut oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, lard oil, linseed oil, neatsfoot oil, palm oil, peanut oil, perilla oil, rice bran oil, safflower oil, sardine oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil; and
- (vi) naphthenic hydrocarbons.

82. The method of claim 3 wherein said thinner is selected from the group consisting of:

- (i) a compound having the formula:

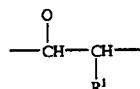


where R is a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched alkyl radical having about 8 to about 24 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10; and

(ii) a non-ionic surfactant, said surfactant being the reaction product of at least one oxide, selected from the

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group consisting of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and butylene oxide, with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9, 10, 13, or 14 having structural units of the general formula:



where R_1 is a hydrogen atom, or an OH group, or a group OR_2 , and where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms, or a group of the formula:



and where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms, or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms.

83. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid is further used in cementing said borehole.

84. The method of claim 3 wherein said operation includes cementing a borehole.

85. The method of claim 3 wherein said fragile gel is a structure capable of suspending drill cuttings that may be immediately disrupted by movement of said fluid.

86. The method of claim 3 wherein said fragile gel reverts to a flowable or liquid state immediately upon resumption of drilling after a period of rest.

87. The method of claim 3 wherein no appreciable pressure spike is observed by pressure-while-drilling equipment when said drilling is resumed.

88. The method of claim 3 wherein said thinner reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at lower temperatures to a greater extent than it reduces the viscosity of said drilling fluid at higher temperatures.

89. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid maintains its viscosity at higher temperatures.

90. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid has a lower yield point at lower temperatures than at higher temperatures.

91. The method of claim 90 wherein said higher temperatures are temperatures over about 120° F. and said lower temperatures range from about 40° F. to about 60° F.

92. The method of claim 3 wherein the equivalent circulating density of said drilling fluid approximates the surface density of said drilling fluid.

93. The method of claim 3 wherein said fluid is tolerant to contaminants, wherein said contaminants comprise drill cuttings from said drilling.

94. The method of claim 3 wherein said fluid does not exhibit sag when at rest.

95. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid is substantially free of organophilic clay.

96. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling is conducted without significant loss of drilling fluid.

97. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid does not require organophilic clays to provide filtration control.

98. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid demonstrates lower differences in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities at faster drilling rates.

99. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling is at different rates and said drilling fluid maintains a low differ-

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ence in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities over said different drilling rates.

100. The method of claim 3 wherein said base comprises a blend of esters with isomerized or internal olefins.

101. The method of claim 100 wherein said esters comprise at least about 10 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

102. The method of claim 100 wherein said olefins comprise about 1 wt % to about 99 weight percent of said blend.

103. The method of claim 100 wherein said olefins have about 40 wt % to about 70 wt % C₁₆ and about 20 wt % to about 50 wt % C₁₈.

104. The method of claim 100 wherein said esters comprise about C₈ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol.

105. The method of claim 81 wherein said straight-chain, branched, and cyclic olefins each have about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

106. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a blend of esters with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of paraffins, mineral oils, glyceride triesters, and combinations thereof.

107. The method of claim 106 wherein said other hydrocarbons comprise from about 1 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

108. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid is ester-free.

109. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a polar solvent.

110. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises isomerized olefins blended with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of linear alpha olefins, paraffins, naphthenes, and combinations thereof.

111. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffin hydrocarbons having about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

112. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffins blended with mineral oils or glyceride triesters.

113. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises naphthenes selected from the group consisting of saturated, cycloparaffinic compounds, compositions and materials having a chemical formula of C_nH_{2n}, wherein n is a number about 5 to about 30.

114. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises at least one additive selected from the group consisting of rheology control agents, viscosifiers, filtration control agents, and HTHP additives.

115. The method of claim 114 wherein said drilling fluid incorporates said additive or additives quickly.

116. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a base blend of esters and olefins, and said thinners and emulsifiers are derived from fatty acids, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C₁₂ to about C₁₄ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or about C₈ fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol and said olefins are isomerized, or internal, olefins having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C₁₆ and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C₁₈ and wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of:

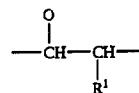
thinners having the following general formula:

R—(C₂H₄O)_n(C₃H₆O)_m(C₄H₈O)_k—H, where R is a saturated, linear alkyl radical having about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10;

thinners comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide

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and/or butylene oxide with C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acids or C₁₀₋₂₂ carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:



where R₁ is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR₂, where R₂ is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



where R₃ is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms;

and combinations thereof; and wherein said drilling fluid further comprises at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology.

117. The method of claim 3 wherein said drilling fluid forms a structure that is capable of suspending drill cuttings at rest and that is instantaneously disruptible by movement.

118. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said invert emulsion has a continuous base comprised of at least one component selected from at least one of the following groups:

- (i) esters prepared from fatty acids and alcohols, esters prepared from olefins and fatty acids or alcohols;
- (ii) olefins comprising linear alpha olefins, isomerized olefins having a straight chain, olefins having a branched structure, isomerized olefins having a cyclic structure; olefin hydrocarbons;
- (iii) paraffin hydrocarbons comprising linear paraffins, branched paraffins, poly-branched paraffins, cyclic paraffins, isoparaffins;
- (iv) mineral oil hydrocarbons;
- (v) glyceride triesters comprising rapeseed oil, olive oil, canola oil, castor oil, coconut oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, lard oil, linseed oil, neatsfoot oil, palm oil, peanut oil, perilla oil, rice bran oil, safflower oil, sardine oil, sesame oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil; and
- (vi) naphthenic hydrocarbons.

119. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said thinner is selected from at least one of the following groups:

- (i) a compound having the formula:



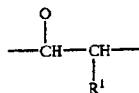
where R is a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched alkyl radical having about 8 to about 24 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10; and

- (ii) a non-ionic surfactant, said surfactant being the reaction product of at least one oxide, selected from the

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group consisting of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and butylene oxide, with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9, 10, 13, or 14 having structural units of the general formula:



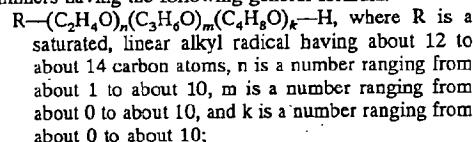
where R_1 is a hydrogen atom, or an OH group, or a group OR_2 and where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms, or a group of the formula:



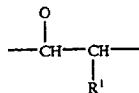
and where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms, or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms.

120. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a blend of said esters and said olefins, and said thinners and emulsifiers are derived from fatty acids, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C_{12} to about C_{14} fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or about C_6 fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol and said olefins are selected from the group consisting of isomerized, or internal, olefins having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C_{16} and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C_{18} and wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of:

thinners having the following general formula:



thinners comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:



where R_1 is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR_2 , where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms;

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and combinations thereof; and wherein said drilling fluid further comprises at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology.

121. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid forms a structure that is capable of suspending drill cuttings at rest and that is instantaneously disruptible by movement.

122. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid forms a fragile gel at rest.

123. The drilling fluid of claim 122 wherein when used in drilling said fragile gel reverts to a flowable or liquid state immediately upon resumption of drilling after a period of rest.

124. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein the ECDs of said fluid when used in drilling boreholes are less than about 0.5.

125. The drilling fluid of claim 5 said drilling fluid is substantially free of organophilic clay.

126. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid does not require organophilic clays to provide filtration control when used in drilling.

127. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid does not exhibit sag when at rest.

128. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid has at least one property selected from the group consisting of fragile gel behavior, no appreciable pressure spike upon resumed drilling, low difference in surface and downhole equivalent circulating densities, no significant sag, and generally flat rheology between higher and lower temperatures.

129. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid has a lower yield point at lower temperatures than at higher temperatures.

130. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid has a lower yield point at temperatures from about 40° F. to about 60° F. than at temperatures of about 120° F. or higher.

131. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid is tolerant to drill cuttings when used in drilling.

132. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said base comprises a blend of esters with isomerized or internal olefins.

133. The drilling fluid of claim 132 wherein said esters comprise at least about 10 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

134. The drilling fluid of claim 132 wherein said olefins comprise about 1 wt % to about 99 weight percent of said blend.

135. The drilling fluid of claim 132 wherein said olefins have about 40 wt % to about 70 wt % C_{16} and about 20 wt % to about 50 wt % C_{18} .

136. The drilling fluid of claim 132 wherein said esters comprise about C_6 to about C_{14} fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol.

137. The drilling fluid of claim 118 wherein said straight-chain, branched, and cyclic olefins each have about 10 to about 30 carbon atoms.

138. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a blend of esters with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of paraffins, mineral oils, glyceride triesters, and combinations thereof.

139. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said other hydrocarbons comprise from about 1 wt % to about 99 wt % of said blend.

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140. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid is ester-free.
141. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a polar solvent.
142. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises isomerized olefins blended with other hydrocarbons selected from the group consisting of linear alpha olefins, paraffins, naphthenes, and combinations thereof.
143. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffin hydrocarbons having about 10 to 10 about 30 carbon atoms.
144. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises paraffins blended with mineral oils or glyceride triesters.
145. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises naphthenes selected from the group consisting of saturated, cycloparaffinic compounds, compositions and materials having a chemical formula of C_nH_{2n} , wherein n is a number about 5 to about 30.
146. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises at least one additive selected from the group consisting of rheology control agents, viscosifiers, filtration control agents, and HTHP additives.

147. The drilling fluid of claim 146 wherein said drilling fluid incorporates said additive or additives quickly. 25

148. The drilling fluid of claim 5 wherein said drilling fluid comprises a base blend of esters and olefins, and said thinners and emulsifiers are derived from fatty acids, wherein said esters are selected from the group consisting of about C_{12} to about C_{14} fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol or 30 about C_8 fatty acids and 2-ethyl hexanol and said olefins are isomerized, or internal, olefins having about 40 to about 70 weight percent C_{16} and about 20 to about 50 weight percent C_{18} and wherein said thinners are selected from the group consisting of:

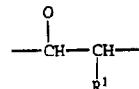
thinners having the following general formula:

$R-(C_2H_4O)_n(C_3H_6O)_m(C_5H_8O)_k-H$, where R is a saturated, linear alkyl radical having about 12 to about 14 carbon atoms, n is a number ranging from about 1 to about 10, m is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10, and k is a number ranging from about 0 to about 10;

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thinners comprising a non-ionic surfactant which is a reaction product of ethylene oxide, propylene oxide and/or butylene oxide with C_{10-22} carboxylic acids or C_{10-22} carboxylic acid derivatives containing at least one double bond in position 9/10 and/or 13/14 having units of the general formula:



where R_1 is a hydrogen atom or an OH group or a group OR_2 , where R_2 is an alkyl group of about 1 to about 18 carbon atoms, or an alkenyl group of about 2 to about 18 carbon atoms or a group of the formula:



where R_3 is a hydrogen atom, or an alkyl group of about 1 to about 21 carbon atoms or an alkylene group of about 2 to about 21 carbon atoms;

and combinations thereof; and wherein said drilling fluid further comprises at least one additional additive compatible with said ester blend wherein said additive is selected from the group consisting of additives for filtration control, additives for high temperature high pressure control, and additives to reduce or control temperature rheology.

35 149. The fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid is used in drilling a borehole in a subterranean formation such that there is a reduction in the loss of drilling fluid into said subterranean formation.

40 150. The fluid of claim 5 wherein said fluid is used in drilling operations such that sag is eliminated or avoided.

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